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ABSTRACT

Training psychologists for school consultation is relatively new. Most training programs do not include systematic training in consultation, and consultation has been identified by school psychologists as the area in which they consider their training most deficient. In light of the inadequacy of school consultation training and the sparsity of research on the effects of training procedures, declarations of training guidelines are not indicated. Training for school consultation is in a pioneer stage, and it appears to be time for sharing of training experiences. The purpose of this paper is to describe the utilization of groups in a school consultation training course and to consider some problems and issues raised by the utilization of groups. To place this description in perspective, what precedes the discussion on groups is a brief consideration of (1) consultation as a mental health service to schools; (2) assumptions underlying utilization of groups; and (3) the course in school consultation. (Author)

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Utilization of Groups in Training for School Consultation

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Training psychologists for school consultation is relatively new. Most training programs do not include systematic training in consultation (Gallessich, 1974), and consultation has been identified by school psychologists as the area in which they consider their training most deficient (Chartoff, 1973). In light of the sparsity of school consultation training and the sparsity of research on the effects of training procedures, declarations of training guidelines are not indicated. Training for school consultation is in a pioneer stage, and it appears to be the time for sharing of training experiences.

The purpose of the present paper is to describe the utilization of groups in our school consultation training course and to consider some problems and issues raised by the utilization of groups. To place this description in perspective, what will precede the discussion on groups is a brief consideration of (1) consultation as a mental health service to schools; (2) assumptions underlying utilization of groups; and (3) the course in school consultation.

Brief Consideration of Relevant Issues

Consultation as a Mental Health Service to Schools

Consultation to schools is increasing (Alpert, 1976). The traditional role of psychometrician is being replaced by the consultation role, a role which enables a consideration of a larger population of both pupils and problems at a time when both are numerous. There are many different models of school consultation, such as mental health consultation, organizational development, behavioral consultation, advocacy consultation, and ecological

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consultation, and each of the models differs with respect to such issues as assumptions, values, goals, strategies, and consultation roles (Dworkin & Dworkin, 1975; Gallessich, 1974; Gallessich, 1976; Reschly, 1976). What is common to most of the models is that they represent an indirect form of service, in that someone other than the psychologist is serving as the primary change agent; a service within an institution; and an innovative service, in that it is relatively new.

Assumptions Underlying Utilization of Groups

One commonality across the models is that, in general, school consultation involves indirect service. Thus, the consultant must work with other consultees, either individually or in groups, around problems concerning the consultee. The ability to develop and maintain trusting relationships is vital here. Thus, one assumption for the utilization of groups is that in order to effectively consult students must have the opportunity to work closely with others, to study how one works with others and around which issues and types of people one can interact with most success.

A second commonality across models is that consultation is provided within an institutional context. Schools, like other institutions, are composed of many groups (Newman, 1974). In schools, there are groups of students, teachers, and administrators, and, further, there are subgroups within these groups, such as groups of Black students and groups of White students. In addition, there are outside groups, such as parents, which relate to the school. In order to consult effectively in schools, the assumption is that consultants must understand groups and such basic concepts as group formation, group behavior, group cohesiveness, group pressure, and group leadership in general, and school groups and roles in particular.

A third commonality across models is that consultation is an innovative service in that it is relatively new. School personnel are accustomed to

psychologists taking problematic children out of their room for purposes of testing. Although such testing may not have always been helpful from the teacher's perspective, it was a service teachers were familiar with and one that did not pose a threat to them. In contrast, the new service of school consultation may be more threatening to teachers. First there is the fear of the unknown. Second, frequently consultation heightens anxiety, at least initially, in that school consultants observe classrooms. Further, from the teacher's perspective, there is at least one advantage to the traditional service. With testing, the difficult child was removed from the teacher's classroom for as long as the testing lasted. Given the above, it is reasonable to assume low receptivity to consultation, at least initially. The important assumption here is that given this low level of receptivity, consultants will need support networks to sustain their activity.

The sharp discontinuity between student and consultant roles, lack of a cookbook for consultation, unrealistic goals of new consultants, and relative lack of receptivity to consultation indicate the need to provide consultants with such support networks as those provided by groups.

Course in School Consultation

In the two-semester school consultation training course, second year graduate students spend a minimum of three hours a week in an elementary or high school functioning as consultants. In addition, students maintain weekly logs concerning their consultation activities, do reading, write theoretical papers, and attend classes in which there is lecture and discussion on readings and opportunities for role playing of consultation experiences. In addition, students have participated in the two group experiences which are described below.

Utilization of Groups in Consultation Training

Project Groups

Students divide into groups based on topics they are interested in studying during the semester. The project scope, product, method of work, and division of grade are determined by each group. In addition to having a product to present in class, each project group is responsible for analyzing its group's process, and each student is responsible for analyzing the way (s)he worked in the group.

Placement Groups

Teams of three student consultants are assigned to a school for purposes of school consultation. Those students consulting in the same school comprise a placement group. Student consultants work individually as well as with their placement groups. For example, working individually, they may consult with an individual or groups of teachers or administrators around issues of concern to them. The three consultants assigned to a school frequently work together on such projects as conducting groups or workshops, implementing programs, and evaluating consultation. Placement groups meet informally in the schools, and are encouraged to have informal contact outside their placements for purposes of sharing information about schools, coordinating activities, and considering who consults with which individuals around which issues.

In addition, placement groups meet for one hour weekly with the course instructor and assistant for supervisory purposes. At the initial meeting, student consultants are told that the expectation is that the student is totally incompetent in school consultation and, further, given this expectation that mistakes are inevitable as well as necessary. Further, they are told that interventions are conceptualized as providing useful information and feedback around issues rather than for evaluation purposes. Supervisory

meetings for placement groups serve the obvious function of monitoring student consultative activity as well as providing another group experience for purposes of both furthering content and process learning as well as providing support.

Variations of the supervisory placement group meetings described above include the observation of one group by another and the supervision by former students in the course rather than the course instructors. The former variation, the "fish bowl", enables one group to assist and learn from the other. The latter variation enables another opportunity for considering relationship building, resistance, and the change process. Student-student supervisory relationships, in contrast with the faculty-student supervisory relationships are seen, for example, as either more or less democratic, threatening, and evaluative, depending on the individuals involved. These relationship differences can be a focus of study, and can throw light on the peer, hierarchical, and consultative relationships in the schools in which we consult.

Problems and Issues Relevant to Groups

During the course of the groups, three major tensions arise. The tensions concern (1) focus, and specifically, process versus content; (2) purpose, and specifically, supervision versus consultation; and (3) format, and specifically, structure versus nonstructure.

Focus: Process Versus Content

One tension concerns whether the groups should focus on process or content. With the former there is focus on how things are said, by whom, when, and what function they serve. With the latter, there is focus on issues and problems resulting from consultation theory and consultative activity. Both process and content are considered in our consultation

groups. The tension concerns how to balance the two.

First, there is a time problem. Sometimes focus on one leaves inadequate time for discussion of the other. Second, sometimes a focus on process seems to raise issues which, at least for some time period, makes team work in schools difficult. Othertimes, of course, it enables the group to function better. Third, the boundary between group psychotherapy and experiential learning is not always clear, and this lack of clarity heightens the tension between process or content focus.

In light of these concerns, process issues have been conceptualized on a continuum, with group process issues on one end and individual process issues on the other. The group end of the continuum involves a consideration of the group as a whole, while the individual end involves a consideration of one individual. In the middle of the continuum lies the individual within the group. An example of an issue at the group end concerns the placement group meetings with students consulting in the high school. The pointing out of the sorority like behavior of the student consultants during the group meeting had a sobering effect on its members. It was at that point that the group acknowledged how they became like their school, and were able, therefore, to look at this socializing process for all school staff. Further, this example enabled all the groups to look at their functioning and how it mirrored the school in which they worked. The group that worked in the depressed school somehow had become a depressed group of consultants when they met together, and the fragmented school was now being served by a fragmented group. Focusing on the "personality" of the placement groups furthered our understanding of the school, enabled understanding of the socialization process, and indicated entry points for change.

An example of an issue in the middle of the group-individual continuum concerns a quiet member in a placement group. He was quiet in a very chatty group, was uncomfortable being quiet, and approached the instructor asking for help to verbalize more. After discussing his concern about speaking in groups and his concern that this inability would make him less effective professionally, the decision was to raise the issue in the small group. Group members listened to his problem, considered how the group contributed to the problem, and what the group could do to assist. An example of an issue at the individual end concern the personal problems of a student who was having difficulty in graduate school and had recently experienced personal tragedy. Rather than burdening the group with the difficulty she was having in establishing relationships both in the group and in the school, the decision was for the instructor to meet with the student alone. This example falls at the individual end because the individual's problems were manifest in many settings. In the preceding example concerning the "quiet within a group context" person, the individual functioned comfortably in dyads and was experiencing relative personal and professional success. His problem was specific to groups, and it is for that reason that it has been placed in the middle of the group-individual continuum.

This group-individual continuum has been conceptualized in order to provide a framework for dealing with the process versus content tension. The working assumption is that, given our course goals, those process interventions which justify time from content concern the (1) group or (2) individual within a group. Thus, more intrapsychic problems are not considered within the group context. In sum, the continuum from group to individual is a continuous one. The question, at what point on the continuum do process interventions justify time from content, has been answered differently at different times. At this moment, the working answer is from the middle to

the left. However, where an issue falls along the continuum is not always clear and the tension remains.

Purpose: Supervision Versus Consultation

A second tension concerns whether the instructor's role in the group is supervisory or consultative. When the instructor assumes a supervisory role, the relationship is hierarchical. The supervisor guides, evaluates, reviews, and directs. In addition, the relationship lasts for the duration of the supervisee's stay in the class. When the instructor assumes a consultative role, both the instructor and student are perceived as two professionals. The instructor, functioning as the consultant, would act in a helping but equal role with her student consultees on issues presented by the students and about which they are experiencing difficulty. The relationship would be non-authoritarian and nonevaluative, and the consultant would have no authority to tell the consultee how to function. The consultant would suggest options, provide support, and facilitate problem-solving. Further, in a consultative relationship, consultee(s) can refuse consultant's help and terminate the relationship.

Both instructor roles have merits. The tension concerns the combining of the two roles in order to maximize positive effects. For our purposes, what is positive about assuming the instructor-supervisory role is the control over the consultative work of relatively inexperienced students. For our purposes, what is positive about the instructor-consultative role is that it frees students to share anxieties, concerns, failures, and weaknesses. In addition, it enables student consultants to experience the consultee role in a consultative relationship. Such experiences should facilitate their work with consultees. However, the instructor's university role seems to limit the ability to assume both roles. Institutional realities such as the submission of course grades, writing of letters of recommendation for intern-

ships and future jobs make difficult the assuming and acceptance of the non-evaluative instructor role. In our work in groups, the instructor is more supervisor than consultant. To enable the more consultative experience, students, in addition to instructor supervision, meet with former students in the course.

In sum, the attempt is to combine the positive aspects of the supervisors and the consultants role. The instructor attempts to do both, but is somewhat limited due to institutional restraints and role definitions.

Format: Structure Versus Nonstructure

The third tension concerns whether the format should be structured. A structured approach would be more supervisory and didactic, and would involve a clear statement regarding priorities and/or an agenda. A nonstructured approach would be more laissez-faire, with students using meeting time for relating activities, airing gripes, talking about anxieties, sharing information, and requesting help, without some clear guideline as to which they should do. With a nonstructured approach, the supervisors would facilitate the groups work, whatever that happened to be.

Both formats, structured and nonstructured, have been utilized at different times in our groups. Whether the groups are structured or nonstructured seems related to what the students do in the schools, in their field work. In their initial work in the schools students are in the entry phase, and they attempt to learn about the school culture. During this period, the loosely structured meeting parallels the relatively unstructured approach to the schools. As the students begin to consult with teachers around issues concerning children and classroom problems, the consultants enter the group meetings with problems and want to leave with some conceptual means for approaching those problems. When there is no structure imposed either by the group or the instructor at this time, there is little closure.

Thus, as the students begin to consult they need more group structure.

The parallel between consultation stages and group needs seems clear. However, students within one group may be at different consultative stages and, therefore, have different needs around structure. Thus, the tension concerns the timing around when there should be structure.

What is clear is that both structure and nonstructure have merits. Structure may further the possibility that all members speak. Also, with structure, there is supervision and concrete suggestion within a supportive milieu, at a time when students are working in a new and ambiguous role. Nonstructure, on the other hand, seems to facilitate the sharing of crises. In sum, how to balance structure with nonstructure is a problem which the group considers. Since a different balance is needed at different times, sensitivity and flexibility is indicated.

Conclusion

For purposes of this paper, the three tensions have been presented separately. In practice, however, they interact. A process focus, for example, is often limited by the instructor assuming a supervisory role and offering structure. Clearly, both the tensions and their interactions are complex. In some ways, however, the tensions have made the group sessions richer. They mirror, in both content and complexity, the tensions consultants experience in their work in schools. Struggling with these "tension issues" may serve to sensitize the student consultants to issues often buried in the school and arm them with skills to dig them out.

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